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SUBJECT: A/S BOUCHER HEARS RUSSIAN WORRIES ABOUT AFGHANISTAN

REF: MOSCOW 11241

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons: 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During October 9 consultations in Moscow, A/S Boucher outlined U.S. intentions in Central Asia, stressed steps we were taking to address terrorism and narcotics trafficking in Afghanistan, and reviewed U.S. nuclear policies in South Asia. Foreign Ministry officials and the Russian Counternarcotics Director expressed growing concerns about Afghanistan and the threat that terrorists and drug traffickers posed to Russian security interests. Foreign Ministry officials emphasized that Russia had no monopoly of interests in Central Asia, but called for greater transparency in U.S. goals in the region. A/S Boucher briefed on U.S. support for regional economic integration and civil society in Central Asia, eliciting Russian concerns that too much pressure to change Central Asian states might backfire. Russian officials expressed an interest in increasing cooperation on counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Russia is likely to support the India Civil-Nuclear Initiative in the Nuclear Suppliers Group. End Summary.

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2.(C) Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher and Ambassador Burns met separately on October 9 with Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Alekseyev and Deputy Foreign Minister Grigoriy Karasin and had a working lunch with both, joined by 3rd CIS Department (Central Asia) Director Maksim Peshkov. Boucher also met with Presidential Counterterrorism Special Representative Anatoliy Safonov and Director of the Federal Narcotics Control Service Viktor Cherkesov.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING TRANSPARENT

¶3. (C) A/S Boucher made clear what U.S. intentions were in Central and South Asia and underlined the value of transparency in U.S.-Russian relations. The U.S. did not see itself in competition with Russia; Washington had made this clear to regional leaders. U.S. goals were to strengthen states so that they could be sovereign and independent, to support the growth of civil society, democracy, and prosperity and to foster long-term stability. Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin said Russia considered Central Asia as a sphere of vital interest and that Moscow also sought transparency and an understanding of U.S. intentions because of the effect on stability in the region. Karasin pointed to Russia's proximity, longstanding political and economic ties with Central Asia and the presence of millions of Russians in the region. He called for greater joint efforts to create a "new spirit" of cooperation. Boucher and Alekseyev discussed Russian attitudes toward the regional counternarcotics

conference held in May in Dushanbe and Boucher highlighted the negative role that disinformation campaigns played in the region.

. AFGHANISTAN: GROWING RUSSIAN CONCERN

¶ 14. (C) A/S Boucher reviewed U.S. and Coalition efforts to increase stability in Afghanistan by fighting terrorism, countering the production and trafficking of narcotics, and supporting the Karzai government's efforts to extend central government rule over the country through road-building and electrification projects. Boucher stressed U.S. support for Karzai, but acknowledged that corruption complicated stability efforts. He called for greater Russian support to strengthen the Afghan military and counternarcotics programs. Boucher also reviewed U.S. efforts to encourage closer cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan to police the border and stop the transit of armed militants.

¶ 15. (C) All of A/S Boucher's interlocutors expressed serious concerns about negative trends in Afghanistan and offered Russian support for U.S. efforts. Deputy Foreign Minister Alekseyev noted that the sharp rise in Taliban strength had surprised the Russians and he drew attention to growing anti-American sentiments in Afghanistan. Arguing that increased instability in Afghanistan would have serious negative consequences for Russian security, Alekseyev offered that Moscow could sell arms to the Afghan Army at subsidized prices and promised to review A/S Boucher's request for renewed support to the Afghan Air Force. Special Representative Safonov questioned whether Karzai was building a strong team that would be able to take over efforts to centralize power once Karzai was gone. Both Safonov and Director Cherkesov emphasized the link between drug money and terrorist activities in Afghanistan.

. CENTRAL ASIA: WHAT DOES STABILITY MEAN?

¶ 16. (C) A/S Boucher explained that U.S. efforts in Central Asia to support civil society and to encourage regional integration were aimed at building stable, prosperous states. U.S. goals were to provide economic and political choices for countries in the region; we shared interests with Russia, the EU and China in countering terrorism, proliferation and narcotics trafficking. The U.S. was not opposed to regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, so long as they do not target U.S. interests, and we support transparent efforts to encourage economic cooperation and trade. The U.S. had limited military training programs in the region and was not interested in new military bases. Boucher singled out President Karimov's repressive actions as aggravating the real security challenges his regime faces. Widespread corruption throughout Central Asia fueled popular discontent and spurred terrorist recruitment and drug trafficking. The U.S. was focused on practical, incremental steps that would propel Central Asian states in a forward direction. Leadership succession should be open and inclusive; the key question was not necessarily who would rule, but how citizens were involved in the selection process.

¶ 17. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin stressed that Russia did not have a "monopoly" on interests in Central Asia. Moscow's goals were to strengthen sovereignty so that states could make their own decisions "based on responsible thinking." Karasin was extremely cautious about political change in the region, noting that legal opposition in each country was limited or nonexistent and that there was some overlap between opposition groups and extremist groups. Reforms were implemented slowly, if at all, and many regimes faced challenges from corruption, narcotics trafficking, and Islamist groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. Russia worked through regional organizations to address these challenges. Moscow wanted stable, peaceful neighbors and saw a "drastic rush to new arrangements in a society" as dangerous.

Director Peshkov stressed that Central Asia's traditional societies and leadership structures would not change overnight and argued that pushing too hard would cause a backlash. Russian interlocutors were concerned that leadership succession in Central Asia would be painful, warning that the perfect should not become the enemy of the good.

CENTRAL ASIA: ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

¶8. (C) A/S Boucher laid out U.S. goals in encouraging regional integration, pointing to the benefits for Central Asia. Afghanistan had long been a barrier between Central Asia and South Asia; the opening of Afghanistan was a historic and strategic change that now permitted north-south flows for energy, trade and transport that would promote links between Central Asia and the rest of the world.

Boucher encouraged Russian support for Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) expansion to allow multiple routes to bring Central Asian oil and gas resources to world markets. He denounced attempts to block infrastructure links between South and Central Asia. None of Boucher's interlocutors addressed economic integration in any detail; Karasin reaffirmed Russian support for ties between Central Asia and the rest of the world, but underlined the strong links remaining between Moscow and the region, in particular as a result of the Russian diaspora in Central Asia. Alekseyev stressed China's growing regional interests, noting that its economic strength allowed it to pursue a more "muscular approach," and pointed to the interconnections between Beijing's security and energy needs.

COUNTERTERRORISM

¶9. (C) All A/S Boucher's interlocutors in Moscow focused on the challenges to Russian security posed by the Taliban's resurgence and Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia. After the Assistant Secretary briefed on U.S. efforts to counter terrorist activities in Afghanistan and the challenges President Musharraf faced in addressing terrorism, Alekseyev responded that Russian cooperation with Pakistan on counterterrorism was limited. It was unclear to Moscow how much control, if any, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) exercised over terrorist training. Safonov called attention to the sharing of methods and technology between Iraqi insurgents and Afghan terrorists and noted that the fight in Afghanistan was shifting to urban areas. He called for greater cooperation with the U.S. in counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan and welcomed the increasing contacts he had with S/CT Ambassador Crumpton. Safonov highlighted the growth throughout the Islamic world of terrorist networks only loosely tied to Al Qaeda. Karasin, Peshkov and Safonov called attention to Hizb ut-Tahrir, arguing that its above-board political activities masked growing support among local populations for its extremist plans. A/S Boucher refuted suggestions that the U.S. had contacts with groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

COUNTERNARCOTICS

¶10. (C) A/S Boucher described shifting U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan and support for the Tajik Drug Control Agency and the Central Asia Regional Information Coordination Center in Almaty. He emphasized that counternarcotics cooperation should increase given shared U.S. and Russian goals. Alekseyev was critical of counternarcotics programs in Afghanistan, pointing to the flood of heroin into Russia. He contrasted the excellent cooperation Moscow had with Tehran with what he characterized as a failing effort on Tajikistan's part. A/S Boucher stressed the progress we had seen in Dushanbe as a result of increased U.S. funding. Director Cherkesov briefed on the Kanal counternarcotics operation that has traditionally focused on Central Asia, but for the first time included Poland, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania. He acknowledged that

Central Asian drug control agencies often had been ineffective, but underlined his support for U.S. assistance in Afghanistan and Central Asia. A/S Boucher pointed to Pakistan and Turkey as models for a long-term approach to control production and trafficking of narcotics. Cherkesov and Safonov stressed the links between narcotics trafficking and terrorism, and Cherkesov promised a Russian counternarcotics office would be opened in Kabul by next year.

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INDIA AND PAKISTAN

¶11. (C) Responding to A/S Boucher's request, Alekseyev confirmed Russian support for the India Civil-Nuclear Initiative in the Nuclear Suppliers Group "so long as the U.S. keeps the deal transparent." However, Alekseyev made clear that Russia would not get out in front in selling other Nuclear Suppliers Group members on the initiative. Moscow was looking to coordinate views with the U.S. He acknowledged that Moscow had been approached by Islamabad about supporting a similar arrangement for Pakistan and that Russia had been asked to build nuclear plants in Pakistan, but stressed Moscow did not view the situations in India and Pakistan as similar and would not supply Islamabad with nuclear plants.

¶12. (C) Alekseyev and Safonov both expressed concerns about Pakistan's stability. Alekseyev emphasized Russian worries about the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons stockpile as well as growing separatist tensions and popular discontent. FM Lavrov was likely to visit Islamabad before the end of the year. Safonov focused on whether Musharraf was prepared to fight terrorist elements in Afghanistan, pointing to the North Waziristan agreement as casting doubt on Pakistan's commitment. A/S Boucher acknowledged Musharraf faced multiple challenges and stressed that the U.S. had urged Musharraf to address all stripes of terrorists in Pakistan as part of Islamabad's efforts to build a modern society.

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